

The New York MICROBICIDES Working Group

a local site of the Global Campaign for Microbicides
www.global-campaign.org

c/o Harm Reduction Coalition
22 West 27th Street, Fifth Floor
New York, New York 10001

July 28, 2004

Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Attention: Electronic Comment File Submission

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of The New York Microbicides Working Group, healthcare advocates, I submit these comments in MB Docket No.04-207, a proceeding to examine cable a la carte. We strongly support greater diversity in media ownership, employment, and programming.

We understand that the instant proceeding is intended to inform the Commission's examination of cable a la carte, a proposal that would permit consumers to buy cable channels individually rather than in bundles. The Working Group believes that the proposal could have a significant negative impact on the so-called "niche" networks, such as Oxygen, that cater to particular interests or demographics such as women, minorities, gays and lesbians, and non-English language speakers. As the record in this proceeding reveals, these programmers view cable a la carte as an extreme threat to their survival. We and they believe that it would undermine existing multicultural networks, erect a substantial barrier to entry for new networks, and erode media diversity.

Niche networks that cater to women and other targeted audiences already have a very difficult time getting distribution on cable. A la carte would only exacerbate this problem and make it more difficult for these channels to attract advertisers or subscribers. If a la carte is enacted, there would be less diversity and fewer channels devoted to women and minorities. As a recent GAO report concluded, "some cable networks, especially the small and independent networks, would not be able to gain enough subscribers to support the networks."

We urge the FCC to heed the concerns expressed by multicultural programmers and civil rights groups regarding the impact of cable a la carte on media diversity, and to recommend to Congress that it not be enacted. It would be unfortunate if a proposal which intended to give consumers more choice and control were to inadvertently reduce diversity in programming and with it the number of women and minority owners, executives, and employees in the cable industry.

Very truly yours,

THE NEW YORK MICROBICIDES WORKING GROUP

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The New York Microbicides Working Group: (1) gets the word out by raising awareness in our local communities about the need for new STD prevention alternatives; (2) provides free trainings to ASOs, clinics, women's health groups, and others about microbicides; and (3) advocates locally and nationally for increased public investment in research and development of microbicides.